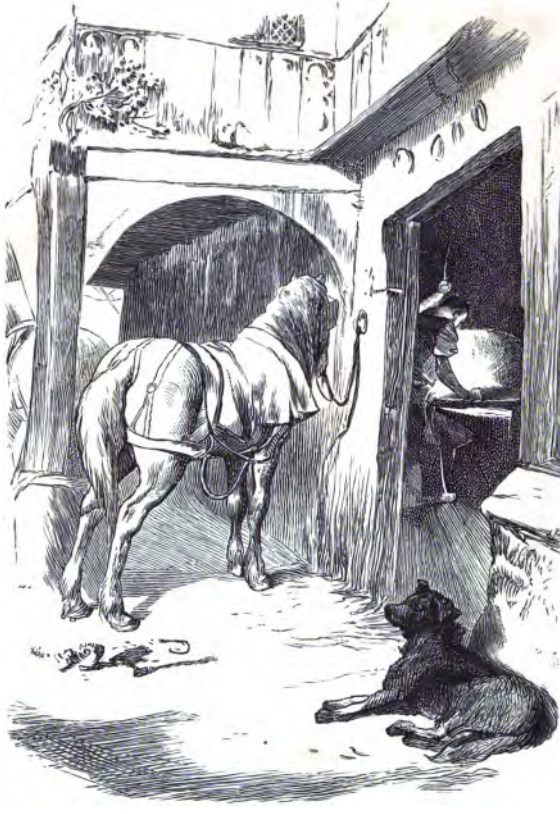

SANDERS MORTON AT WORK IN HIS SMITHY.

FERGUS MORTON.

FERGUS MORTON:

A STORY OF A SCOTTISH BOY.

BY

J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.

"Footsteps, that perchance another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
Some forlorn and shipwreck'd brother
Seeing, may take heart again."

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FERGUS MORTON.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was nothing conspicuous about the cottage where FERGUS MORTON, the little hero of my tale, was born. It was in a retired part of Scotland, close by a village green, with a rivulet flowing through it. Large elms, topped with rook's nests, were clustered around; and among these picturesque and gnarled trees, at a turn of the road, was a blacksmith's shop, or "smithy," belonging to Fergus's father. No man in all the village was more esteemed than Sanders Morton;—familiarly known by the

name of "The Blacksmith." He was a sort of little oracle in the place. He was, in the best sense, the friend of his poorer neighbours; both able and willing to tender, asked or unasked, a sound advice. Nor was he less respected by the rich: the "lairds" around knew him to be an unrivalled judge of a horse; the farmers of the neighbourhood invariably deferred to his skill in the treatment of all animal ailments; in the great cattle markets, held twice a-year, Sanders, in the eyes of both buyer and seller, was the important man of the hour and the district. Yet, for all this, he was a hard worker, honest and industrious, sober and frugal; while the ringing sound of his big hammer on the anvil shewed what stuff his brawny arm was made of. He would almost seem to have sat for his portrait when the poet wrote these words:—

"His brow is wet with honest sweat;
He earns whate'er he can;
And looks the whole world in the face—
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn to night,
  You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
  With measured beat and slow.

And children coming home from school
  Look in at the open door:
They love to see the flaming forge,
  And to hear the bellows roar."

Among that crowd none was more regular or interested than young Fergus; and, perhaps, as was natural, he had some privileges accorded to him which were denied to his companions,—such as taking a turn in blowing the bellows, or tethering the horses by the rough iron rings as they came in to be shod, or getting a ride of a few paces up and down in front of the smithy door, on the animals that had been kept longer waiting until his father was ready. Rover used to look knowingly on, and wag his tail approvingly at his young master's performances, —for you must know that the Morton's dog was, in his own way, as often dogs are, a village character also. He was a beautiful black sleek creature,—a cross between a

collie and a setter, uniting the sagacity of the one with the affection of the other; with russet-brown on his cheeks and paws, and eyes that looked kindly on everybody that was kind to him, and specially so on Fergus; —for though the blacksmith, when he came in from his work, was often tired and unable to humour his humble companion in his frolics, Fergus's lessons were never so engrossing as to prevent him exchanging a word with his four-footed friend.

Fergus had one sister—Elsie—older than himself, of whom he was very fond; and well he might, for she had been everything to him since their mother had been taken away in early childhood. But as she was the great joy of his young life, so was she the occasion of his first, and, in some respects, his deepest sorrow. For Elsie fell ill. She tried for months to hide her illness from her father and Fergus; but the cough gradually increased, her hands became thinner and her cheeks paler, and the pain in her side more acute.

"Wisht, wisht!" she would say to Fergus as she saw him beginning to look concerned and anxious, "it's naething at a'; when the flowers begin to bloom, and the birds to sing, I will be all weel again, and help you and father to delve the yard and rake the walks." But, alas! it was a vain hope. It soon became manifest to all, save to Elsie herself, that she was not to be long for this world. Her father's quick eye discerned, sooner than most, the sad reality. Leaving the horses standing by the smithy, he would, every now and then, run along with his bare arms, and his leathern apron tucked up at his side, to ask how she was keeping, and then return—always with a heavier heart—to resume his work. One thing alone comforted him,—that Elsie was well prepared for whatever the will of God might be. She had been taught early to love Jesus as her Saviour. To no one in the village had the Sunday school proved a more signal blessing; and although it was mysterious for so young a life to be so early taken, yet, but for the leaving of

her father and Fergus, it was manifest from many things, that she was not only reconciled, but even happy, at the thought of her departure. It was touching to hear her, ever and anon, moaning in her hours of restless sleep,—"I am goin' home; I am goin' home!" and in her waking moments—now convinced that it was vain to try and hide her dying state from Fergus—she would put her pale arms round his neck and speak to him words of advice and comfort.

"And, Fergie," she said, in her loving, familiar, sisterly way, in closing the conversation one bright afternoon, as the setting sun fell on her braided hair, and turned it into gold,—"you 'll seek to please Him, and love Jesus when you are young; and work, —work wi' a brave heart, and never be idle. Be kind to father,—his heart will be wae when I 'm awa'; but you 'll try to do what I would hae done for him." She added: "Here, laddie, is my ain Bible; ye 'll take it from me, and keep it, and love it for my sake." And, truly, this Bible had been to

her a long and precious object of desire and interest. Its purchase was the result of her little gatherings with the penny she got every week, and the bright sixpence invariably given by the blacksmith to his children on their birthdays. It was plainly bound, without any ornament, but with a good large type.

"I'm no able, Fergie," she continued, "to write; my fingers are getting weaker; but I'll double the leaf down, and put a stroke with my pencil at the verses I like best." They were these, at Psalm xxxvii. 5, 6:—

> "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

At last the sad day, long dreaded, but too surely anticipated, did come. A little crowd of villagers, dressed in black, stood with their hats off around the cottage door; and the coffin, with white cords, was carried outside the wicket gate opening from the

He was of a singularly tender spirit. He never himself knew how deeply he had loved Elsie until he lost her. His grief, moreover, quickened the progress of another disease which had been sapping his iron constitution. "The poor man is dying of a broken heart," was often whispered by the neighbours to one another, as they saw him pass with slow and measured step to and from his work. He used to sing merrily at his forge; but Elsie was now away; the effect of her death was what some of you may have seen in the case of the caged bird deprived of its mate, when it droops its wings and ceases to warble its old notes. Sanders Morton used to be the strongest man in the village, and brave as he was strong. But it was different now. Sometimes, from sheer bodily weakness, he had to sit down and rest on one of the rude benches beside his tools. At other times he would lay down his hammer and cover his eyes with his hands, crying, "My bonnie lamb! my bonnie lamb!" Fergus, who was now almost constantly with

him, assisting him at the anvil, generally thought it better to say nothing. He found when he tried to do so, it only made his father worse. He allowed him to give full vent to these bursts of grief, and he was able the sooner to resume his work.

There was another reason of a different kind which tended to deepen the anxieties of the blacksmith. He was generous and confiding; and in an unfortunate moment, from the desire to relieve a neighbour and friend from some pressing obligations, he had put his name to a bill. His neighbour had failed—Sanders Morton had become responsible for his debt; and to sadder heart sorrows he found himself, all at once, from no fault of his own, a ruined man. He would have cared comparatively little for this, so far as he was himself concerned, trying though it was to have the savings of a frugal lifetime so suddenly swept away. But it was a bitter pang to him the thought of leaving Fergus penniless, instead of bequeathing what would have enabled his boy

to start the world with advantage. But in this, as in other things, he bowed without a murmur to the will of God.

One morning in early spring, when the patches of snow were still covering the ground, the blacksmith's shop was closed. He was dead.

CHAPTER II.

It is only those who have passed through the reality, who can tell the loneliness of being left an orphan;—when all that made life and home joyous and happy has perished for ever from sight. I shall not attempt to describe the sad change in poor young Fergus's life;—those days, more like months, which elapsed since the time when his father was laid side by side with Elsie in the adjoining churchyard. Nor shall I dwell on that mournful forenoon when another crowd was assembled for a different purpose around the old cottage door. It was the "roup day," when the blacksmith's little furniture and effects required all to be sold in order to pay his debts; and on which occasions—comparatively rare in a remote country village—many are attracted from curiosity and other

causes. Fergus remained within the house, seated by the fireless grate, his eye vacantly fixed on the dead embers, with Rover on his knee. The animal never tried to alter his position, unless it were now and then to lick the hand of his master, as if he wanted to take his own dumb way of manifesting sympathy in his misfortunes. Not that there was any lack of this among the neighbours, for Fergus was a favourite of the villagers, for his own sake as well as for his father's. "That puir bairn!" was often and again whispered among the assemblage, as one piece of furniture after another was handed through the door to the auctioneer outside, and knocked down generally far below its real value, every few minutes rendering the walls barer and more desolate. There was one villager, conspicuous among the others, for his kindness to the orphan boy. This was Andrew Gordon, whose every-day employment was that of an under-gardener at the castle of C——. He had insisted on taking Fergus, the night of his father's

funeral, to share his own room with him, making up a little couch in the corner of the apartment. It was a gleam of sunshine in the heart of the lonely boy, amid these shadows of death, which was never forgotten. Fergus knew Andrew's worth, and how thoroughly he could trust him.

The principal proprietor of the parish was living from home; but the factor was a kind-hearted man, and alike from his respect for the father, and his interest in a friendless orphan, he took the first opportunity, when going to business to a distant town, of securing, through some friends, a situation for Fergus. The arrangements were all completed in a few days, and Fergus prepared to leave the home of his childhood and early love—it might be for ever. No one was more devoted or assisting to him on this occasion than Andrew. "I liked your father weel, Fergus. I never can forget him; and as I am soon to sail for New Zealand, you must take as a gift from me this little trunk. I don't need it any more myself. It will

keep all your bits of things together." He suited the action to the word by dragging out the smaller of two occupants of a press beside the door. And the kind fellow set to work, helping Fergus to pack his various articles of clothing in a square black leather case, with several rows and devices of brass nails upon it, somewhat irregular now compared with what they once had been. These pieces of dress were not very numerous. The only thing, over and above the wearing apparel, that had been saved from "the roup," was Elsie's Bible. This they folded in the blacksmith's best silk handkerchief—the one he used to keep specially for the church and Sunday. "Fergus," said Andrew, "I'll no like be soon back again,—say nothing about it; but here, lad, is ten shillings from me,—keep them in your kist,—they may be of use to you some day when you are in straits. I just wish I had mair to spare." With this he put a little yellow paper parcel in the corner of the trunk, and when it was locked, Andrew placed the key in Fergus's pocket.

Fergus could only express his thanks with something wet which fell from his cheek on the brass nails.

"Andrew," said Fergus, after a moment's pause, "I have something to ask you. Could you do me another good turn? although I dinna like to trouble you mair after a' you have done."

"Yes; that I will, if I can manage it," replied the other.

"Well," said Fergus, unable to use many words, and giving utterance at once to what was much at his heart; "Andrew, will you take charge of Rover?"

"Aye will I," said Andrew, with a heartiness which lifted a heavy load from the poor boy's thoughts.

"Thank you—thank you," was the reply. "But mind, Andrew, you will never part from him; dinna let him fall into any other body's hands, and—ye ken—ye ken——," he added hesitatingly, "ye ken what I mean; I would rather you would make away wi' him, than he run the chance of bein' ill used

by strangers. My poor good dog!" he continued, grasping at the same time Rover's paw, and pressing a kiss on his glossy forehead.

The night before Fergus left, he stole out alone in the quiet moonlight. The stars were shining, and here and there lights were twinkling in the cottage windows. He turned his steps first to the churchyard. The gate was open. Then he went back along the road to the smithy. He took out his knife and cut a piece off the bark of one of the old elm trees, under which he and Elsie together used to make cowslip garlands, and put what he had cut into his pocket. He returned home, or rather to the room in Andrew's cottage; but it was to spend a sleepless night.

CHAPTER III.

FERGUS awoke on the morning of the second day in his new home. It was a garret, with a strange slanting window; its only furniture a deal table, a chair which once had a back, but now had none; and his own trunk with the familiar brass nails, which seemed to greet him like an old and welcome friend amid so much that was new and unfamiliar. The day was fine; but the blue sky best known to him was obscured with dense smoke. The lumbering noise of wheels, even at that early hour, told the completeness of the change in his history. Merry sounds, too, from the outside street came floating up to his window,—the ringing laugh of boys, such as he used to hear in the summer nights on the village green. But there was little music in them at present. He had never

before so felt his desolateness and friendlessness. Father, Mother, Elsie, Andrew, neighbours, even Rover,—none were left. Fergus, however, knew what duty was. He was not one that would allow himself to mope and fret, to no avail, over trials which had been sent him by a Higher hand. With brave resolution he dashed away the gathering tear, and sprang out of bed to commence the new struggle of life. After commending himself in prayer to his heavenly Father, he opened Elsie's Bible, for the first time since leaving home, and turning to the doubled-down leaf, he read what had never given him such comfort as now:

> "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

I need not stop to describe particularly what his new occupation was. I may say in a word, that whatever his ultimate promotion might be, he had been taken, meanwhile, as

an errand boy into a grocer or provision shop. The shop was situated in a poorer part of the town, and was dependent principally on customers of a humbler rank of life. Fergus's duties consisted in lighting the fires, sweeping out the shop in the morning, rubbing up the old-fashioned brass plate outside, which contained his master's name and vocation, going messages, and carrying parcels to different parts of the town. The work was at first irksome compared with what he had been accustomed to; but he soon came to like it, and made conscience of doing it with a will.

He might have had many worse, but he might have had many better masters than the one with whom his lot was now cast. Mr. S—— was a man who looked older than he really was, short in stature, with prim mouth, big horn spectacles, and his face deeply marked with small-pox. He had been, too, from his youth, an inveterate snuffer, which was in favour neither of his appearance generally, nor of the white apron

specially which he generally wore as the badge of his calling. Although not without his good points, he was naturally nervous and irritable, and generally spoke as if out of temper. He never seemed to take a bright view of things. He was one of those on whom the sun never seemed to shine, always looking out of life's window on clouds and rain. Moreover, he was not a religious man. This, it is to be feared, was the true cause of much of his restlessness and peevishness. He lived for this world alone, without a care for another and a better. The earnings of his shop formed the only thought of his narrow soul. He seemed to have few friends, and did not care about adding to their number. Nor had he any favourite occupation to fill up the gaps of his time—the leisure hours of life—when the work of the day was over. In the shelves of the musty parlour above his shop, whose walls were hung round with coloured pictures of the four seasons, there lay a few odd volumes of the "Penny Magazine," which, with an

occasional weekly newspaper, constituted his sole reading and library. It was seldom he ventured to give his apprentices or shop-boys a look of encouragement. But yet, to do him justice, where there was real worth and merit, he was quick in discerning it; and this was happily the case with Fergus. "Well done, my lad!" were the words which, with a pat on the back, or a stroke of his doubled-up white apron, occasionally expressed his approbation with the bright-polished brasses, or with the dexterous removal of the heavy shutters of the shop window in the morning, or with the active and obliging manner in which he had served some customers during the day.

There was only one other in the shop. He had been there for two years, and was about that same period older than Fergus. The master was not so lavish in his commendation of Steenie. Nor, truth to say, did Steenie deserve it. He could not certainly help his appearance; but even this was unfavourable. Small ferret-looking eyes, a

broad nose, and short cut hair, constituted his main features. But there were points in his character less favourable still. He was artful, jealous, suspicious, untruthful,—extremely busy and active when his master's eyes were on him, and very much the reverse when his master's eyes were turned away. But what wounded Steenie to the quick, and roused the worst qualities of his nature, was the evident preference which the master bestowed on Fergus. Steenie was as often scolded as Fergus was praised; and the consequence was, he contracted a rooted hatred of his younger companion, and took every opportunity, even at the expense of truth, of damaging him in the eyes of his master. Steenie's spiteful feelings towards Fergus were deepened on other grounds. Steenie made a mock of all that was good. Poor fellow! allowance must be made for him; he had not the same advantages in early years which Fergus had. He had a drunken father and mother, who never thought of encouraging him to go to the Sabbath school,

though there was one close at hand. He had grown up in a state of lamentable ignorance of every kind. Add to this, his present master felt no interest or concern, as all good masters should do, in the spiritual welfare of their workmen and apprentices. Steenie never thought of attending church. He made it his regular custom to go out to the fields on Sabbath to smoke his pipe, generally landing at the public-house; and when he urged Fergus to follow his example, and got a refusal, (which he always did,) this only served to increase his hatred towards one who, if he had but known it, was acting as his best friend. Among other things, Steenie had formed the habit of profane swearing. Fergus, again and again, tried, in his own prudent and considerate way, to rebuke his sin, and reason with him about its wickedness. "Steenie, Steenie," he would say, "you are no wrangin' me, lad; you are only wrangin' yoursel'. But no, I shouldna say that neither, that you are no wrangin' me; for if you but kent it, you are makin'

my life miserable. May God forgi'e ye!" Steenie, however, paid no heed. To such a remonstrance as this he would only swear the more. Fergus saw there was nothing for it but to bear in silence.

It was very nearly a year after Fergus had been in his situation, that Steenie devised a deeper and baser plot to ruin the character and reputation of the innocent orphan boy. Fergus, when he first made Steenie's acquaintance, had, in the simplicity of his heart, told him the particulars of his own past history, and more especially those freshest in his mind, which had occurred at the time of his father's death. He had retailed to him, among other things, the story of Andrew's kindness, including, of course, the ten shillings which had been placed in his trunk as a parting gift. The incident was too eagerly seized upon to invent a cruel and wicked falsehood. Steenie secretly informed the master that Fergus was in the habit of stealing money from the till. The master at first unhesitatingly discredited the accusa-

tion; but Steenie returned to the charge; he asserted that he could prove it, and that, too, by the surest of all evidences,—viz., that a parcel of stolen money would be found hidden in Fergus's trunk. The master was still strong in his conviction of the boy's honesty; but as Steenie was so resolute in declaring his companion's guilt, the former resolved, as much from a desire to clear Fergus as anything else, to have the matter sifted. When the shop was closed for the night, and when Fergus had gone on a distant errand with some purchases, the opportunity was taken by the grocer, in company with his informer, to go to the boy's garret and ascertain the truth or falseness of the charge.

The lock of the trunk was not a strong one to force open; the little man stood with keen eye, his spectacles raised on his brow, as the articles of clothing, carefully folded, were, one after another, removed by Steenie; and when the depths of the box were reached, there, secreted in a corner, was found the

fatal yellow paper and ten shillings wrapped in it! The effect of the discovery on the master was what might have been expected; it was like a sudden gust of wind on a mountain lake, filling it in a moment with crested waves; it threw him into a storm of passion; and it was well for poor Fergus that, owing to the distance to which his message had taken him, a full half-hour elapsed before his return; otherwise, the incensed shopkeeper might have vented his rage upon him in a different way than with mere words.

It would occupy too much of our time to speak of the scene which ensued, and to describe Fergus's emotions when summoned up stairs to confront his accusers. He saw his trunk lying open, his things scattered on the bare floor, the master holding in his hand the yellow parcel, and Steenie with a flush of mingled shame and triumphant revenge on his cheek. He was too agitated to speak; and perhaps his very confusion at the moment confirmed the grocer's reluctant verdict

of "guilty." At last, though in vain, the poor boy, in a passion of tears, asserted and re-asserted his innocence; he fell on his knees before the person he had tried to serve so faithfully, and solemnly assured him before God that all was false. In broken sentences he sought to explain how the money had come to him. But there is no doubt the whole thing, to say the least, looked suspicious. How could Fergus possibly have been the possessor of that ten shillings? He had received no earnings since he came to the shop. He had come with the reputation of being without a penny in the world; and as to his own account of the way he procured it, it looked very like a got-up story. This Andrew Gordon who had been so strangely generous, according to the boy's own statement, had conveniently gone to New Zealand, so that there was no way of finding out from him about its truth. In one word, Steenie had wickedly triumphed. Fergus was ruined in his master's eyes; the little thin lips of the latter were white with rage; he dived

into the depths of his snuff-box,—always the way in which he gave outward expression to the violence of his temper,—stamped with his feet, swore as he had never been heard to swear before. When Fergus saw him with lips thus compressed, following Steenie down stairs, taking along with him the money and shutting the room door furiously behind him, he threw himself down by the open trunk, uttering a low moan of heart agony. His present was anguish even sadder and deeper than when he kissed, for the last time, Elsie's cold cheek, or took the farewell look on the still face of his father. These other trials, great as they were, had their exalted solaces; but "a wounded spirit who can bear?" He had no one to plead his cause, and prove his innocence. One word from Andrew would have put all right; but he was now far off on the ocean. He had but one friend left—that was a Heavenly one. After gathering up, one by one, the articles of clothing, folding them afresh and placing them in his box, he took up his Bible, which

he had purposely left out. Kneeling by his bed-side, and opening it at the well-known page, he read through his tears,—

> "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

CHAPTER IV.

FERGUS came down stairs next morning, as usual, to his work, fevered, agitated, and trembling, head-sore and heart-sore. His master said nothing; he passed and re-passed without exchanging a look or word. Fergus's first impulse was to make a new attempt to clear himself; but on second thoughts he deemed it better, for the present at least, to be silent; an opportunity might occur by-and-by, when the other might be more calmly disposed to listen to his assertion of innocence than now. Meanwhile, with that best of all possessions, a good conscience, he resolved to go quietly on with his duties in the shop, leaving his cause with Him who is the Father of the fatherless, and who judges righteous judgment.

Though Fergus was in ignorance of the

fact, the master's first resolution had been to inform the police of the theft which had taken place, and hand the young offender over to justice. In this case, several weeks, possibly months of imprisonment would have been the penalty of his alleged crime. On reflection, however, he altered his determination,—not on account of any feeling of clemency for the boy, or of leniency towards his first offence; but the grocer was one of those characters occasionally to be met with, who have a great horror at any public exposure of their private affairs, and who would rather silently suffer than be on the lips of the outside world. He had a further feeling of wounded dignity at the thought of being "done" by an apprentice boy, and of this same "public" becoming aware of the fact. Uninfluenced, therefore, by any kindly consideration for Fergus,—indeed, with feelings very much the reverse,—he resolved to continue him on for another half-year; keeping, meanwhile, a stricter look-out than hitherto after his keys and money-drawers; and with

the intention of quietly giving him his dismissal at the expiry of that time.

Whatever may have been the precise state of the grocer's feelings, there was no mistake as to those of Fergus. The boy was miserable. He found himself shunned, watched, distrusted; and what perhaps he felt more cruelly still, he was tyrannized over by Steenie, who had succeeded, for the time, to the place of confidence he had formerly occupied. Steenie had trust both of money and goods which had once been in the hands of Fergus, and which he was now wickedly abusing. Fergus too easily saw the danger of his present position. By continuing where he was, at the mercy of a treacherous and unprincipled companion, he might at any moment be involved, by Steenie's dishonesty and misrepresentations, in fresh and more serious troubles. He battled on manfully day after day until the load became intolerable, and he felt he could endure it no longer. He resolved at all risks, therefore, to take a step which, in ordinary cir-

cumstances, he knew well would have been wrong and unwarrantable,—viz., to leave without delay, and without any intimation of his purpose, the grocer's employment. It was for many reasons a great struggle before he could make up his mind to throw himself thus again adrift on the world, and by the very act of doing so, to confirm, if this was now required, the hard and erroneous suspicions of his master as to the theft. And, young reader, there is no more difficult question than to know what the path of duty really is when situated as Fergus was. To go nobly on in the midst of fierce temptations and fiery trials, trusting God and doing the right, is the heroic way, and one which brave natures such as Fergus's would have chosen; but there were considerations connected with Steenie's wicked life, over and above those I have specified, and which I could not retail in these pages, which made the friendless boy feel shut up to the decisive step: anything would be better than his present misery, and anxiety, and temptation.

Where to go, and what to do, he knew not. Might it not be possible, one of his many thoughts were, to find out the port from which Andrew Gordon had sailed, to offer himself as one of the crew of a ship bound to New Zealand, and be happy once more in the genuine kindness and society of his old friend? But all this he would leave to a kind Providence; it was enough that he had resolved to go; and further, that the next night would be his last under his master's roof. He set himself, accordingly, to make the necessary arrangements for his departure.

It was now the month of May, and he had received, only a fortnight before, his first year's wages of one pound; but out of this he had to pay the price of a pair of shoes and moleskin jacket, which left over, all he had in the world, the small sum of five shillings and eightpence. After putting on the shutters for the last time, he spent an additional twopence-halfpenny at an adjoining shop on two sheets of writing paper,

an envelope, a postage stamp, and a small piece of thick wrapping paper; these he took with him to his room. He spread one of the note sheets on the rough deal table, and wrote upon it as follows:—

"O Steenie, Steenie! before I leave I must write to you. You have done me a great wrang; but I forgive you. I trust one day you may be sorry for all your sins, and repent o' your present bad life; the master upon earth you may deceive, but the Master above you cannot.

"FERGUS MORTON."

Having folded up these lines, directed them, and affixed the postage stamp, he put them in his pocket to be ready to post some days after; he then selected from his trunk a few things that would be needful, and which he could easily carry in a bundle, leaving the others behind. He had hesitated long that morning what he would do with Elsie's Bible. He loved it sacredly, (none but he knew how sacredly,) yet it was too

large and heavy to take with him; and though it cost him an effort the thought of injuring or mutilating it in any way, he resolved at last to tear out the page which Elsie's dying hands had folded down and marked; also her name, which was written in yellow faded ink on the fly-leaf; these he sewed carefully together, making a cover of the brown paper which he had just purchased; having placed them in the pocket of his jacket, he returned the Bible to his trunk and locked it. He folded the key in the other sheet of white paper, after writing upon it as follows, and putting the grocer's name on the back of the parcel:—

"This is the key of my trunk; the only thing in it I value is my sister Elsie's Bible. Keep it carefully. I am innocent of the sins laid to my charge; God knows this. I feel it would have been sore wrong to leave my master's service but for reasons which I cannot here tell him about.

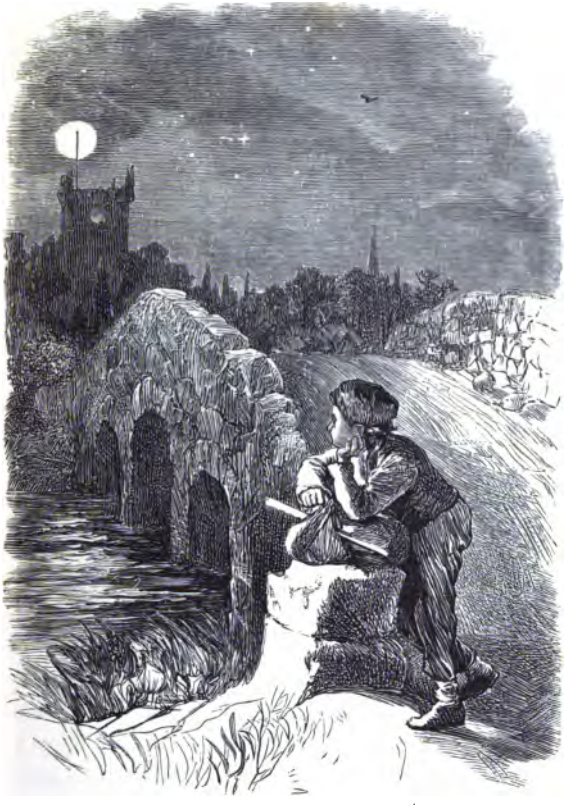
"FERGUS MORTON."

These lines, along with the key, he put under the bed-clothes, knowing that they would be found in due time, when he was far away.

CHAPTER V.

I SHALL not attempt to describe the long journey, and the events accompanying it, of the following day. In order to make the most of the little money which he had still left, Fergus commenced by a tedious walk of five hours to a distant railway station. There he took a third-class ticket by the forenoon train, which cost four shillings and threepence; and when he reached the town of —— it was an hour after sunset. Weary and hungry, he bought some bread and cheese, with a porringer of milk, at a dairy shop. The future was at the present moment a dark prospect to him:—he never so felt his helplessness; alone in a strange place, without a friend, or the hope of finding one. Had he done wrong in leaving his work and his duty? Was it too late yet to find his way back, and

try once more to struggle resolutely on, rather than pursue this harder battle still, with starvation and beggary? He walked up and down, to keep himself warm, in the chill night air. A crowd of people were hurrying past him; but not one had any interest in the lonely boy. He refrained from addressing any of them; or rather, he only made one attempt to do so; but the man answered gruffly, and he resolved not to repeat it. Wandering on, he hardly knew where, he came to a bridge with several arches. He leant on the cold stone parapet. He thought of Elsie and his father sleeping quietly and peacefully in the dear old churchyard. He envied their sweet repose, and longed to be beside them. The moon was by this time shining beautifully in the rippling water as it rushed swiftly through the bridge. He had dreadful thoughts for the moment. One plunge into that dark stream and all would be over; death would make him forget his misery and sadness. But it was only a momentary passing imagination, of which he



FERGUS RESTING ON THE PARAPET OF THE BRIDGE.

was afterwards greatly ashamed. The following lines faithfully described alike his position and his feelings:—

"I stood on the bridge at midnight,
As the clocks were striking the hour,
And the moon rose o'er the city
Behind the dark church tower.

I saw her bright reflection
In the waters under me,
Like a golden goblet falling,
And sinking into the sea.

And like those waters rushing
Among the strong-built piers,
A flood of thoughts came o'er me,
That filled my eyes with tears.

My heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care;
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear."

He went down by a flight of steps under the last arch, where the river laved a bank of rough grass. He lay down on this slope to get, if possible, an hour or two's sleep. If he had only had Rover with him, he felt

how great would have been the comfort: he would have made his glossy back his pillow, as he had often done before in happier days. But this being impossible, he spread, as he best could, his bundle of clothes as a support for his head. Before closing his eyes, he put his hand in his pocket, and, bringing out the only remaining tie which still knit him to the old village home, he read, with the help of the bright moonbeams,—(it seemed like Elsie's voice speaking from a happier, brighter world,)—

> "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

He made an early start next morning, after a scanty breakfast on the fragments saved from the frugal supper of the previous night. He followed the road across the bridge. It led into the country; and the sun having just risen, he was able to pursue his way almost undisturbed. On counting

the money left in his pocket, he found that he had only threepence remaining, with which to procure his dinner that day; and then—oh! what then? He felt, however, invigorated by his few hours of sleep. There was something, too, in the balmy morning air which was refreshing, and which served to keep up his spirits. The very birds—some trilling their notes in the hedges which lined the road, others soaring overhead—made him remember one of the last lessons he had learnt at the Sabbath school: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God: but even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." He was young, and strong, and willing to work;—might not some farmer at that spring season, when so many hands were required, be willing to take him, even though he only gave him his meals and a bed, without any wages? or, possibly, he might come in his journey upon some blacksmith's shop, where

he might get a job, in the old way he liked best, and with which he was most familiar.

Occupied with these and such like thoughts, he was walking dreamingly along a retired and somewhat narrow road, with an irregular hedge on one side, and a paling on the other, —the hedge here and there white with hawthorn, and scenting the air with its fragrance. All at once he heard a rattling noise as of wheels coming behind him. It seemed like the sound of a horse, or horses, galloping very fast. It came nearer and nearer. He thought he heard, too, some voices crying for help. There could be no mistake as to what it was; for, in another moment, a conveyance turned the corner, with a brown horse dashing onwards at full gallop without a driver. The driver had been pitched from his seat more than a mile from where Fergus was, and, as was afterwards ascertained, had his leg broken by the fall. The animal plunged furiously past till it came to a turn in the road where there happened to be one of those old-fashioned bridges, high

in the centre, still not uncommon in some places in Scotland and Wales. Here the horse fell, and struggled violently. Fergus ran with all his speed to give what help he could. Being well accustomed, in former days, to deal with horses at the old smithy, his first business was to rush to the animal's head and keep it flat down. A lady, pale with fright, stept with difficulty out of the carriage; and, meanwhile, a man who had seen the disaster at some distance came running across the field, and, taking charge of the horse, enabled Fergus to go to her assistance. The latter seemed ready to swoon away, and, as she seized Fergus's firm hand, had only strength to cry out, "My Ned! my poor Ned!" Fergus, in a moment, lifted up a little boy of about five years of age, who had fallen by the shock into the bottom of the carriage. His face was deadly white, and a few drops of blood were flowing from a scar on his brow. It was evident he was the more seriously injured of the two. The mother of the child had now recovered her

consciousness, and Fergus was the first to speak,—"Never fear, ma'am, I'm a poor boy, but I'll take your young master down this bank to the water and bathe his temples." So saying, he carried him to the stream under the narrow bridge. He first wet his lips, and laved his forehead; then placing him again carefully in his arms, he conveyed him across the field to the nearest cottage.

Little Ned had speedily other willing hands to wait upon him and bear him to his own home, which was not more than half-a-mile from the place where the accident had occurred. Two men, who had the charge of the hedges on the property, were soon on the spot; and the child having revived, and the wound in the head being bandaged up, he was carried by a near footpath to Beechwood, the name of his own and his widowed mother's residence,—for he was her only child, his father having died three years before. The lady, in the terror, and agitation, and anxiety of the moment, had forgotten her unknown benefactor. Fergus

desired no thanks or reward,—for he was a kind, as well as a brave boy, and he felt he had only done his duty, and that had made him happy. But if the lady had for the time overlooked his services, there was another who had not. Before those who had left the cottage had reached half-way home, the little sufferer raised himself from the mattress on which he had been laid, and said in a feeble, yet earnest, imploring voice,—"I want him, mother; I want the boy that was good to me." The wish had only to be uttered to remind of a debt of gratitude. Whoever this strange lad was, he had been the means, under God, of rescuing them from great danger,—probably of saving their lives. Accordingly, so soon as they reached the next cottage, a messenger was despatched to the bridge for Fergus, who was found in the act of putting up his bundle ready for a fresh start.

An hour afterwards found him seated by little Ned's bedside. It was in a small room, hung with white curtains. The walls—

papered with green, and sprigs of red flowers upon it—were covered over with all kinds of pictures, evidently cut out of books large and small; specially had they been indebted to the *Illustrated London News;* and the way in which they were coloured left no doubt who the young artist was. Then the shelves, between the window and the fireplace, were filled with toys of divers sorts and sizes, from horses—some without tails, and others without legs—to railway engines, tenders, and carriages, which also shewed signs of similar rough usage, and in which, to say the least of it, from the condition of the wheels, the lives of the passengers would have been exposed to serious peril. All these, however, had at present no claim on the attention of their youthful owner. His head was aching, and his hands twitched nervously. It was ascertained, indeed, satisfactorily, that he had received no serious injury; the doctor, who had been speedily sent for, assured them there was no cause for anxiety. The scar on the head was only

a skin wound, the bleeding of which had already ceased; yet the little patient had been severely shaken, and, being naturally of a delicate frame, it was of the utmost importance that he should be kept quiet, and carefully tended for days to come. The scene, itself, seemed to haunt him. He awoke up every few minutes from his snatches of sleep in a tremor, and nothing would soothe him but to put his hand in that of Fergus's. He would allow no one—not even his mother—to apply the sponge of vinegar and water to his brow, except "the boy who was kind to him." He had quieted down, however, towards the afternoon, and fallen into a refreshing sleep. Mrs. Maxwell—Ned's mother—took this opportunity of asking Fergus his own name and history; while, at the same time, she gave instructions to her servants to prepare a bed for him, and to bring him some refreshment,—of which the poor boy stood greatly in need.

Fergus was won at once by the kindness

of the new friend, who, by a remarkable providence, had thus so unexpectedly been raised up to him. In the openness of his own nature he narrated to her all the circumstances of his past life, concealing nothing. She listened with a sorrowful interest to his forlorn tale. She did not, indeed, altogether like the story of the ten shillings and the sudden leaving of his master; but yet there was an air of frankness and outspoken honesty about the boy which won her sympathy; and whatever his faults or errors might be, she felt that she and her child alike owed to him, under a Higher hand, a debt of deepest gratitude, which it well became her to repay by present kindness. Ned, by this time, had again awoke. It was strange and beautiful to see how tenderly Fergus waited upon him, arranging his pillow, moistening his lips, when he thought they required it, with a little wine and water;—and stranger still was it, when there was no apparent reason, to see a tear now and then standing in his clear blue

eye. The truth was, the pale, delicate boy before him, reminded him much of Elsie, and recalled all the little attentions it was once his happiness to bestow upon her. He seemed to be living those sacred days over again;—no wonder his heart was full!

The hour of nine had by this time struck on the lobby clock. Neddie was again fast asleep, and his mother beckoned on Fergus to retire for the night to the room which had been made ready for him in an outer wing of the house. Fergus walked noiselessly on his stocking soles through a number of whitewashed passages till he reached his assigned quarters. He was, as might well be expected, overcome with sleep, after the eventful incidents of that long day. Despite of his fatigue, however, he knelt down by the clean white coverlet of his bed, and before offering thanks to his Heavenly Father for all his mercies, he spread the well-known leaf before him and read the words which, at that moment,

seemed to have music in them which they never had before:—

> "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

He rose from his knees peaceful and comforted.

CHAPTER VI.

When he awoke next morning, Fergus found himself in a plain, but bright little chamber, with a broad latticed window in two divisions. This opened with a latch out on a grassy plot, which was gay with some of the earlier spring flowers; a few old box trees, cut into queer shapes, surrounded an equally old and grim-like sun-dial right in front; while, from a belt of evergreens on either side, there came that sweetest chorus of birds which can only be heard when summer is in its earliest infancy. Fergus opened the casement; the music, the fragrance, the balmy air, all seemed to revive and cheer him. He could not help feeling how great was the contrast of the repose and beauty which now met his eye, with the din and smoke which had been

alone familiar to him for the past year and a-half.

While gazing out of the window he heard, close by, the bark of a dog; and the next moment the animal, at one bound, jumped in by the opened casement. The boy's first feeling was fear; his next was amazement, and wonder, and delight. It was Rover! "Rover! my own Rover!" he cried again and again, as the creature, half wild with delight, barked and whisked about; now on his knee, now licking his hands and cheeks, then making a fresh circlet, only to land again in the arms of his young master. The servant first, and then Ned's mother, roused by the unusual noise, came running to the room to see what had happened. They were in equal perplexity, — as they saw Fergus seated on the floor, with a face flushed with mingled emotions, hugging the animal round the neck. At their appearance the dog indulged afresh in another series of wild antics; only, however, to land again in the arms of the stranger boy, and lick the tears

which were now running down his cheeks. "It is Rover, ma'am; I've found my own dog Rover." The lady only looked more puzzled than ever, when she heard the name correctly pronounced, and exchanged her looks of bewilderment with the housemaid, who, as I have said, had been summoned also by the noise and hubbub. Fergus could only continue to repeat, as the animal was playfully gnawing his hand between its teeth,—"Yes, ma'am, it is my own dog, which I gave to Andrew Gordon, now abroad."

All was soon explained. Rover, indeed, it was; and Andrew's dog, too. And Andrew —strange to say—was the driver of the carriage who had got his leg broken, and who was now lying in a precarious state at the distant Infirmary of ——, whither he had been carefully conveyed by train, in an invalid carriage. He had never gone to New Zealand. The very day he was to have sailed, this situation of gardener and general servant at Beechwood had been offered to him. A friend advised him to accept the

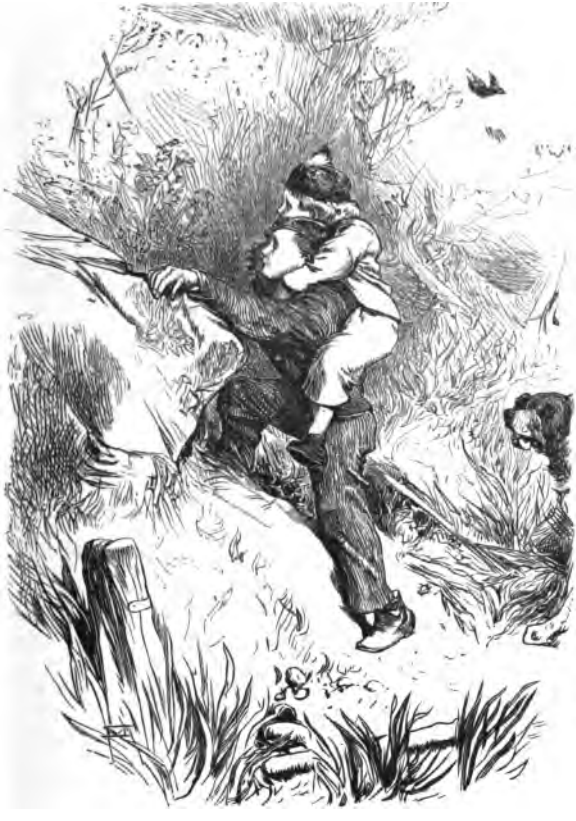
certainty, rather than risk a doubtful success in a distant colony; and, as his passage was not taken, he and Rover came forthwith together to their new, and what they found to be, comfortable abode.

. . . . . .

Deprived thus suddenly of Andrew's services,—at a time, too, when the garden work most needed them,—it occurred to his mistress that she could not do better, during the weeks he would necessarily be confined to the Infirmary, than avail herself of the assistance of the orphan boy who had been so unexpectedly cast upon her. Fergus had known something, though not very much, of gardening in former days. He could at least weed the walks and trim the borders. The runaway horse he would willingly have managed, but it had been prudently sent away the day after the disaster. Ned's pony, however,—which was also used in the pony carriage,—had to be groomed and looked after, and Fergus was quite at home here; so he was installed without delay, for the time

being, in Andrew's place. Mrs. Maxwell had intended, in a few days, so soon as she could leave her little child with an easy mind, to make a journey by train to town, in order to see Andrew, taking with her some wine and preserved fruit, also some flowers from his hothouse, which she knew he would prize above all. But she was only too ready and willing to gratify Fergus by allowing him to go in her stead. She had taken care, however, previously to prepare Andrew for so unexpected a visitor, in case the surprise of seeing him all at once, without any such warning, might, in his weak state, have done him harm. Accordingly, so soon as his strength permitted, Fergus joyfully set out on his expedition. We may imagine the happiness of the meeting;—how much they had mutually to recount since they last parted, and how singular was the providence which had once more brought them together! The account of Andrew's progress was, on the whole, encouraging; and Mrs. Maxwell fulfilled her own purpose, a few weeks later,

of going to town to judge for herself. She was delighted to have confirmed, from the lips of her trusty servant, the favourable opinion she had been led to entertain of Fergus. Meanwhile, the latter—ever since the accident—continued to retain a firm hold on the affections of little Neddie. While attending faithfully to his own out-door work much to his mistress's satisfaction, it was part of his duty—and, we need not say, it was his great pleasure—to spend several hours of the day with his young master. Neddie had soon so far recovered as to be allowed either a little exercise on his pony led by Fergus, or a walk—if he liked it better—through the avenue; or, what was the height of his happiness, to be carried on Fergus's back along the narrow footpath which led up the glen, in search of ferns and pieces of white quartz and spar for his rockery—Rover, of course, always with them. Or, to vary the amusement as he grew stronger, they would repair together, with rod and fishing-basket—the last birth-



LITTLE NED CARRIED ON FERGUS'S BACK UP THE GLEN.

day present—to the pool under the waterfall; Neddie being quite as proud and happy that the contents of the basket, with which he delighted to astonish his mamma, were the result of Fergus's more skilful angling, as if he had caught all himself. Thus pleasantly did these summer months pass at Beechwood.

CHAPTER VII.

ANDREW had not made the rapid and satisfactory recovery which, at one time, had been fondly expected. He had returned, indeed, to his mistress's service and resumed his work. For nearly two years he continued at his post, and, with Fergus's assistance, the place had never been better kept. But the long confinement in the Infirmary had told on a constitution not naturally strong; the limb had never perfectly healed; and, probably by overtaxing it, disease in the joint began to manifest itself, along with other alarming symptoms. The consequence was, that he was obliged first to give up the harder parts of the garden labour, then the work altogether; and afterwards it was deemed advisable, indeed necessary, to resume his old quarters in the Infirmary,

where he would receive that attention and treatment which were impossible in a secluded part of the country. Fergus was a frequent and willing messenger from Beechwood, to inquire for him and cheer him with a visit; generally carrying, as a gift, whatever fruits or flowers were in season, with some fishes from Master Ned's basket, some seedcakes baked by the housekeeper, and a bottle of wine from his mistress. Sincere was the interest felt in Andrew's case and recovery; for on account of his kindly ways, his steadiness and good conduct, he had come to be regarded quite as one of the family. He never allowed the familiarity in manner, which his mistress encouraged, to pass into want of respect. He knew his own place, and kept conscientiously within it.

I need not stop to describe the visits thus paid from time to time to Andrew's sick-bed. But one of these cannot be passed in silence. Fergus had, on that occasion, towards an autumn afternoon, reached the Infirmary ward. The nurse met him at the door, and

spoke to him in the usual low whisper, enjoining as little noise as possible, owing to several cases that required absolute silence. Fergus obeyed; leaving his thick-soled shoes behind him on the mat, and then moving on gently between the long row of white beds and pale ghastly faces towards that on which Andrew lay, and which was at the eastern end of the corridor. He had reached about half-way, with his eyes bent on the floor, not venturing to disturb the patients by casting so much as a passing glance at them, when he caught the words, uttered with an effort, and yet scarcely audible:

"Fergus! Fergus Morton! Come, come!"

He stopped and hesitated. He did not even attempt at first to look round in the direction in which his name was pronounced. But, on the words again reaching his ear, "Fergus! oh, do come here; I am near my last,"—he could resist no longer. He looked to the bed on which the dying patient (for he was evidently dying) lay. He saw a pale haggard visage, which he failed at first to

recognise; the eyes sunk in their sockets, and hollow cheeks, from which every vestige of health had departed. Could it be—yes, undoubtedly, it was,—sadly, miserably altered indeed,—but there was Steenie!—Steenie, his old fellow shop-boy, whose wicked thoughts and wicked ways had cost his young heart so many deep pangs. As Fergus approached, the dying lad attempted to put up the sheet to screen him, as if he could not bear to look on the face of one he had so greatly wronged. But the effort was too much for his weak skeleton hands. He dropped it; a cold sweat broke over his forehead.

"Steenie, is this you?" said Fergus, seeing at once the struggle, and seeking by a kindly word to control it; (the conversation was in broad Scotch, but I have put it in English, to make it more intelligible.) "God have mercy upon you; I forgive you. Yes, Steenie," as he saw the poor wretched creature's continued agitation,—"yes, I have forgiven you long ago, with all my heart."

"Oh,—but,—but," said Steenie; he stopped, as if he knew not what to say. Fergus completed his sentence.

"But, you have been like Joseph's brethren to me, Steenie; you may have meant it for evil, but God brought it all about for good. If it be a comfort to you in your dying hour that your old companion is happy, then, sure enough, I am. I have a good place, and a good mistress; and, above all, I've had a kind and a gracious God, to whom I was taught to commit my way; and He has brought it to pass."

"Oh! it is no that with me," said the other, with stifled breath; "I am, as you see, fast dying, and, what is worse, I have been an awful sinner, Fergus; I have gone far down the bad road since you left the shop. I got in with even worse companions. I cheated the master over and over, till at last he found me out. He got me lying insensible. I came to ——, thinking to go to the sea; but that very night I was dismissed I spent all the rest of my wages in

drink. I quarrelled wi' a man who was drinking with me. I stripped off my coat and fought with him; and I knew nothing more about anything, till, a week ago, I found myself in this bed, with the doctors round me; and every day I am sinking—sinking fast."

By a silent sign the nurse had come to the bed-side.

"Bring me," said Steenie, "a piece of paper and a pen,"—still addressing his female attendant,—"and write what I tell you." Fergus stood in silence as the poor youth dictated these few words, giving at the same time the grocer's name to be written on the envelope which was to enclose them:—

"I was a bad one to Fergus Morton. He never stole any of your money. All he telled you was true. It was me that cheated you. I am fast dying, and I want you to ken the truth. Forgive me, and tell him you have heard from me.

"STEENIE."

When this was folded up, he took the letter from the nurse and put it into Fergus's hands, saying, "Put a stamp upon that, and post it whenever you can. I am thankfu' I ha'e seen you. O Fergus, Fergus," he added, "I wish, min, I was like you. I would like sair if I could live my life again; but it's ower late—it's ower late;" and the fragile frame sank exhausted on the pillow. Fergus felt that, in Steenie's weak state, it would be wrong, for the present, to speak more to him. But before he left Andrew's bed-side, to whom he had long previously told the whole story, he extracted a promise that he would try and say something to direct the miserable lad's dying thoughts, and soothe his dying hours. The nurse arranged that Andrew should be moved to the empty bed next Steenie's, and have it drawn as close as the space would permit. No one can tell of what use the kindly, faithful words of this honest, upright Christian man may have proved. Fergus never saw either again. Steenie lived only three

days longer; and Andrew's happy spirit got its release, from pain and suffering, little more than a fortnight later.

CHAPTER VIII.

FERGUS now succeeded his good and ever-revered friend, alike in his work and his wages. There was only this difference, that, instead of the thatched cottage at the end of the garden-walk, where Andrew lived, and which was much in disrepair, Fergus never left the little room, in the side-wing of the house, which he had occupied at first; and even Rover seemed now to consider he had a right to lie all night on an old rug by his master's bed, and keep watch over him and the rest of the household. Fergus amply fulfilled the promise he had given as Andrew's assistant; and in matters in which he had been at first defective, he had shewn himself an apt and willing pupil. He turned out an excellent gardener, skilled in sowing

vegetables and managing the strawberry beds; taking cunning devices to screen out rabbits from the cauliflower and young peas, and what he was more jealous and proud of, from his moss-roses and beds of verbena and geranium. And then his old love of horses was unabated; the brown runaway had had his place supplied by a dapple-grey; and his mistress used occasionally to allege, that some portions of the grass walks were more hurriedly done than they would otherwise have been, in order that Fergus might have longer time to make its hide, and that of Ned's pony, look as glossy as possible. Many a time he and his young master made a mounted errand together to the smithy, or to the post-office, or to inquire for some invalid in whose ailments they would otherwise have had no very special interest.

. . . . . .

Time thus passed on,—for I must bring my story to an end. Fergus's good mistress was dead. Ned, now a young man, had followed the bent of his youthful inclination

by becoming a soldier, and had gone with his regiment to India. The old home, in the absence of the young owner, was let to strangers;—kind enough people in their way, but Fergus felt every day more and more how great the change from other times, and how sorely missed were the dear old faces. By-and-by, by dint of frugal management, he had succeeded in saving so much, as allowed him to fulfil the dream of many years,—viz., to go back to his native village and become possessed of a cottage and a small piece of ground, which, with his knowledge of gardening, might enable him to earn a comfortable living for the rest of his life. The factor was still there, though now an old man; but retaining his old kindly disposition, as well as his kindly remembrance of the blacksmith and his only remaining child. The lapse of time had told upon the smithy, as upon other things;—indeed the walls had got into so tottering a state, that they required either to be rebuilt or removed. At Fergus's humble request the factor ac-

ceded to the latter; and on its site, and close by the well-known aged elm trees, a neat cottage was erected. The ground that used to be encumbered with cart-wheels and ploughshares, big wooden blocks, rivets, axe-heads, and other iron implements that one always associates with a blacksmith's workshop, were cleared away. Andrew's old garden, which adjoined,—with a cluster of beehives very much as he had left them,—was also included in the new pendicle. Ere long, although in a different line, Fergus Morton became, like his worthy father before him, a leading man in the village. His trim little abode was the most attractive in the place; and at the annual flower-show, his roses and dahlias, hollyhocks and carnations, bore off a fair share of the prizes, even though the best gardeners in the neighbourhood were among the competitors. The respect in which he was held had a more enduring foundation. The principles which were early instilled into his young mind, had never been forgotten. They had guided

him through life. They made him happy now in his time of joy, as they had sustained him often before in his many and varied days of trial. He became first a Sabbath school teacher, and then an 'elder' in the church. Among other natural tastes which he had inherited from his father, was his treatment of cases of illness, although, with him, it took the higher form of human ailment. His visits and advice at such times were alike sought and valued. The good fellow would never hesitate—even in the coldest night—to put on his plaid and trudge a long distance that he might minister to a sick and dying child.

CHAPTER IX.

One winter's day in the end of February, when the ground was sprinkled with snow, the weekly carrier's cart stopped at the little wicket-gate of Fergus's garden, and a box was handed to him carefully covered with coarse pack canvas, and as carefully directed. What this could be he could form no idea. On removing the covering, what was his astonishment to behold before him, after the lapse of so long a time,—for there was no difficulty in recognising it,—his old trunk;—yes, the same old trunk, with its quaint rows of brass nails, which had been given him on the very spot where he now stood, so many years before, by Andrew Gordon! The key was fastened by a piece of string to one of the handles. He gazed upon it for a few minutes in silence. It was like looking on

the face of an old friend we imagine had long been dead, and whom we expected never again to see. On opening it he found, lying on the top, a sealed letter. When he read it, it was as follows:—

"FERGUS MORTON,—I am your old master who now writes to you. I have just found out where you live. I send you back your own trunk. The most valuable thing, indeed the only valuable thing in it, is your Bible, which I hope may reach you in safety. I cannot tell you now how that Bible has been blest to me. Some years ago, when I was recovering from fever, I began to think of my careless and worldly life. I felt I was not prepared to die. I took up the precious volume; I read it, I may say, day and night. It gave me peace I never had before. It has made me, I trust, a changed, a happier, and better man. I ask you to accept of the other trifling contents of the box. I know now that you served me faithfully, and were unjustly wronged. Steenie's letter was duly

received, and explained all. If you ever come so far as the town of —— I will be happy indeed to see you.

"H. S."

With strange, mingled feelings did Fergus read the letter, and with still more sacred emotion did he proceed to open the parcel, carefully put in white paper, immediately under. It was Elsie's last treasured gift. He pressed it to his lips. The sight of it, and what he had just read about it, brought a gush of tears, which had been strangers to his eyes for many years before. The rest of the box was filled with sundry articles of grocery, which Mr. S—— had considerately thought might be an acceptable gift—the only proof, indeed, which he could give of his gratitude and regard.

In the early part of that same spring, Fergus was desirous, as usual, of procuring new seeds for his garden and a few new implements necessary for working it. These he could obtain easily in the nearest market

town; but it occurred to him that it might be well, by availing himself of the invitation he had shortly before received, to have the satisfaction of seeing once more his old master. He at once resolved on doing so. A bright crisp morning was selected for the excursion; in honour of which, moreover, the best coat and hat were called into requisition; also a favourite staff which he had cut in former days in the glen at Beechwood, during one of his strolls with little Ned, and which was scrupulously reserved for such special occasions as the present. When he reached the scenes of his early life-struggle, he stood for a few minutes on the opposite side of the street before venturing to cross it. The shop itself was unchanged; the old name was still there,—though the letters were more effaced. There, too, were the same big, unshapely glass bottles, with their varied contents, the piles of brown and white sugar, and the busy flies buzzing about them, just as when he left. The very boys were, as aforetime,

standing outside with their fingers in their mouths, and making silent remarks to one another as to what they would like best, and could not have. A little old man, too, was at the door, with silver spectacles erect on his forehead. His hands, thrust in his pockets, were overlapped with a white (or once white) apron, and a pen was stuck in his ear. The spectacles, and wrinkles, and white grisly hair were new; but the face could not be mistaken. Fergus more easily recognised his former master than the latter did Fergus. Indeed there was no perceptible vestige in the manly form who now stood before him of the chubby-faced boy who used so bravely to bear the big shutters on his shoulders, or tie up the brown parcels behind the counter, or run the messages with such nimble feet. When he made himself known, however, he was at once accosted with a warm shake of the hand, and a pat on the shoulder, which reminded him of the kindliest of the old and rare methods of approval. He was taken direct to the back parlour,

with which, in former days, he had been so familiar. It seemed to wear an aspect of cleanliness and good order which it did not possess in Fergus's remembrance. There were no cobwebs now on the ceiling, or smuts on the window. The table was dignified with a crimson cloth—and the old Penny Magazine could boast of a number of goodly associates in a neat oaken cupboard, which had taken the place of the former musty chest of drawers. From some knitting pins and worsted that were lying on one of the chairs, Fergus guessed that Mr. S—— must be indebted to some other inmates for this happy change in his former untidy, indeed slovenly ways. He was correct in thinking so. A few years before, his only brother, the only relative he had in the world, had died, leaving three orphan daughters. The grocer had at once insisted on taking them to his house and making it their home; an arrangement which soon proved as much for his comfort and happiness as it was for theirs. Though this was Fergus's first visit,

it was not his last. The previous relation of master and shop-boy was soon changed, despite of their disparity in years, into that of mutual friends. Nothing struck Fergus more than the alteration which had taken place in the whole nature of the old man. Elsie's Bible, or rather the blessed truths of that Bible, had succeeded in softening a naturally irritable temper, and given a bright and mellowed sunset to a day of murky cloud. Nor was this the only result of this renewal of their acquaintance. The eldest of the grocer's three nieces—a congenial spirit—became, in due time, Fergus's wife; and the little cottage, under the shade of the old elm trees, seemed to look all the brighter after the advent of its new inmate.

Fergus was spared, many years after, to enjoy much happiness. He died as he had lived, reposing peacefully in the merits of his Saviour, and was followed, with heartfelt sorrow, by all his neighbours, as his father had been before him, to his last resting-place. He was laid close by his parents and

sister, under the weeping willow which he had planted with his own hand at Elsie's death. His sorrowing widow erected over his grave a plain, simple tombstone. The inscription was as follows:—

HERE LIES

FERGUS MORTON,

Born, December 3d, 1819.
Died, August 20th, 1868.

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."
PSALM xxxvii. 5, 6.

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